

Mr. Ford's Page

THE immigration question has come to the front again and gives another illustration of the difficulty of deciding national policies with rigid mathematical precision. The fact that this question occurs is proof that something is wrong; the fact that no offered solution can be considered as final is proof that we have not yet found the principle that should govern us.

Two points are fixed, of which it will be very hard to dispose. One is our national tradition as a place of refuge for all people. It will be impossible to cause the people of the United States to turn their faces like flint against the populations of the Old World who wish to come to us. We have stood before the world as the open door for all who would begin their lives again in a condition of liberty; we have never refused sanctuary to the person fleeing from persecution.

The other point has already been made: our national attitude is the first; the plight of the alien is the second; they merge together. To close our doors is not a national act alone, it reacts upon human beings elsewhere. And that we shall ever be loath to do.

That is to say, perhaps, that we are incurable sentimentalists on this question. We may admit this, even while we keep a shrewd eye on those who diligently play upon our sentimentality for their own purposes.

We may admit most of what the spokesmen tell us, too—the spokesmen who are more interested in other races than they are in America. We may admit, for instance, that this country was made by immigrants. So it was. The pioneers were immigrants. They came to a wilderness and made it blossom. They came to a bleak and stormy coast and filled it with commerce. It is impossible to honor them too much.

We ought to be frank enough, however, to see that not all modern immigrants are of pioneer quality. It is one thing to come to a country to help make it, and quite another thing to come to a country as to a ripe tree to pick it. *There was no immigration problem in the United States so long as immigrants came to help make the country.* The country knew its friends, felt the impulse of new life with every shipload of those who came seeking a place to bestow their best. But as soon as the type of immigration changed to include people who came to pluck the country of its good things, immediately the body of the nation felt its vitality decreasing, as with some slow insidious disease, and presently we knew that we had an immigration problem.

The pioneers came on their own initiative. A very large proportion of those who come now, are brought; they are transported as literally as an army is; they do not form that surging forward of the free and independent portions of other peoples which characterized our former immigration tidal waves. No country can have too much of the pioneer spirit, too much of that loyalty which contributes to the upbuilding of its institutions.

But what have we been getting in this country, particularly of late? What have we been importing besides immigrants? The immigration of destructive ideas has been enormous, too. It is easier to deal with immigrants, in whatever condition of physical, mental or financial decrepitude they may come to us, than with the false ideas which so many of them bring. That is one of the conditions that make the immigration question: we are importing something else besides people and the danger of disease; we are importing dangerous and false ideas—dangerous because false.

Now, America is on the right road, or she is on the wrong road. The United States stands for personal liberty within the limits prescribed by the public good, and for equality before the law, or it does not. Our Constitution is the charter of a proper kind of national life, or it is not. We must take one side or the other on these matters, and we must classify men according to the side they choose. If they are of the opinion that the United States ought to be

changed into something else, let them be so classified. They, however, cannot be considered as citizens contributing to the upbuilding of this country. If there is a class of people who come to us saying, "We are the apostles of a new era; your way of doing things is wrong; your whole system must be changed," we are entitled to say in reply, "That many of our ways are imperfect, we have long known; we are trying to perfect them; tell us how it is that a light has shone on you with reference to American problems that has never shone on us; show us what you have behind you in achievement and then we shall consider your fitness to become our rulers."

And, for the most part, we find that these people have no constructive record at all, and have nothing within or upon them that recommends them to us as the friends of the American spirit. They may propagate the idea that Americans think them dangerous only because they are dangerous to certain practices by which some Americans practice; they are wrong; we think them dangerous because they run contrary to the spirit of America.

The immigration problem is not only a question of numbers. The country is not in danger of being over-populated. There are still great areas of land waiting for people. It is not the number of the newcomers that constitutes the problem, but their unwillingness to begin as pioneers, with the land, and their unwillingness to become American in the American sense.

This, of course, is due to several causes. And before the immigration question can be tackled satisfactorily, a number of things must be done.

The custom of hawking about Europe for immigrants who have least to leave should be prohibited. We are getting now those classes which their home governments are gladdest to get rid of. Indeed, their home governments are so glad to be rid of them that they facilitate their progress hither.

The custom of certain societies in the United States of assisting thousands of immigrants to evade the law by providing them with the amount of money required should be stopped. The same fold of bills brings any number of immigrants into the country, thus destroying the virtue of the law which makes possession of a certain sum an indication of certain desirable qualities.

The custom of immigrants settling in the cities should be so regulated as practically to be stopped. What immigration is doing for us now is simply extending the slums of our large cities until they threaten to taint every part of every community. The United States should assume the right which other governments

have assumed and say to the immigrants, "You may go here and settle where you will, but you may not go there." President Taft once said he wished that Russian Jew immigrants would go elsewhere than to the cities. "The more we spread them out in the West the better I like it," he said. "I have tried to help it along so we could help them directly on to the plains of Texas."

This custom of city settlement is encouraged, it is believed, merely to give power to racial rulers which set themselves up in every large city. Settled on the land, the immigrant would more readily imbibe American ideas and would be less amenable to the leaders' plans, and thus a leadership built upon so-called "racial solidarity," but really upon ignorance of American ways, would fall. This type of leadership is a very grave danger in this country, and it is the cause of some very disquieting manifestations in our national life.

More stringent rules of citizenship should be made. The immigrant should be more stringently required to look forward toward citizenship as an important part of his career, and the standard of the requirements of citizenship should be much higher and more strictly applied. It should not be more difficult to acquire membership in a lodge than it is to acquire membership in the citizenship of the United States of America. We have been far too negligent.

THE immigration question is not one of numbers but of nature; of quality instead of quantity. Here is room enough for all of the right kind; here is no room whatever for one of the wrong kind. So long as pioneer spirits came to this country to help build it up, there was no immigration problem. But as soon as the parasites and malcontents began to swarm here, the problem arose at once. Two principles will go far to solve it: First, selection; second, distribution. We must select those who are capable of becoming Americans; we must say to them, "You shall not settle in the slums of any city, but go into the great open spaces of the country."